

Care for the Strangers, Mistreated and Prisoners who Suffer.

Hebrews 13:2-3; Matthew 22:34-40

Bible Teacher In Training: Stephanie Wyche

I. Historical Background & Biblical Context

When questioned about the greatest commandment in Matthew 22, Jesus emphasized that our foremost duty is to love the Lord our God with every aspect of our being—our hearts, souls, and minds. Moreover, He intertwined this paramount commandment with another of equal importance – to love our neighbors as ourselves. In these concise yet powerful words, Jesus highlighted the inseparable connection between our love for God and our love and treatment of those around us. This is expounded upon thoroughly in Hebrews 13:2-3 with how we should care for those who are strangers, mistreated, and prisoners.

During the time of Hebrews, early Christians found themselves facing severe persecution and isolation due to their unwavering faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This led to a need for guidance, encouragement, and hope, which the letter of Hebrews provided. It reminded them of the enduring principles of faith, love, and perseverance. It helped them hold onto their beliefs as they navigated the challenges they faced.

Both Matthew 22:34-40 and Hebrews 13:2-3 share a common message – a call to put love and compassion into action. These scriptures harmoniously echo the importance of active love, inviting us to not only profess our faith but to tangibly demonstrate it through deeds of compassion, kindness, and devotion to both God and others, especially those who are strangers, mistreated, and prisoners.

God's commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves in Matthew 22:39 lies at the heart of this lesson and serves as its foundational principle. Love should be the guiding force behind our actions with others. This commandment resonates as a timeless and universal call to practice love in our everyday lives. To love

God fully is to love our neighbors and loving our neighbors is a reflection of our love for God. Additionally, our love for others should be as deep and genuine as the love we show ourselves.

II. The Lesson: Care for the Strangers, Mistreated and Prisoners who Suffer (Hebrews 13:2-3; Matt. 22:34-40)

In Hebrews 13:2-3, we are told to care for strangers, mistreated, and prisoners. We are encouraged to practice hospitality and compassion. We are called to extend love and kindness, especially to strangers, and to show solidarity with those who are suffering.

A. Show Hospitality To Strangers

Hebrews 13:2 reminds us to show hospitality to strangers. Hospitality is defined as the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of strangers. Strangers are individuals who we do not know or who are not part of our immediate community or circle.

But what does hospitality truly entail? Hospitality is rooted in love, kindness, and care. It's a virtue that encourages us to welcome, host, and care for strangers with warmth and generosity, while also creating an atmosphere of comfort and acceptance. There are three core elements to hospitality:

1. **Welcoming** is the foundational step in hospitality. It means receiving and greeting strangers with openness and a friendly attitude. It's about creating an atmosphere that makes others feel accepted and valued.
2. **Hosting** involves providing accommodations and taking care of the stranger's needs. The goal is to ensure that strangers have a comfortable and protected place to rest and relax.

3. **Caring** is showing a genuine concern and attentiveness to the well-being of the stranger. It involves going the extra mile to ensure that the stranger feels respected and valued through our thoughtful actions.

The verse goes on to say in the NIV, "... some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." This suggests that, on occasion, when people have extended hospitality to strangers, they may have unknowingly welcomed angels. The significance lies in the fact that divine encounters and blessings can result from acts of kindness and hospitality. Our acts of kindness and hospitality can carry spiritual significance. In other words, God can use our hospitality to orchestrate divine encounters that act as a channel for divine grace and blessings to enter our lives. By reaching out and caring for strangers, we may be participating in something greater than ourselves.

B. Remembering The Prisoners

Hebrews 13:3 calls us to remember and show compassion to prisoners. Prisoners encompasses all individuals who find themselves incarcerated or imprisoned for various reasons. By remembering, we go beyond just casual thoughts to genuinely caring about their well-being. We as believers are called to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are suffering. Regardless of their mistakes or circumstances, prisoners deserve to be treated with respect and compassion. We must recognize them and offer physical and spiritual support to them. This involves keeping them in both thoughts and prayers, but also extending love and care through compassionate actions.

C. Remembering The Mistreated

We are instructed to actively remember and empathize with those who endure mistreatment. This command extends to all people who face any type of unfair

treatment, discrimination, and suffering who bear the weight imposed upon them. Here we must go beyond mere acknowledgment as we are encouraged to step into their shoes, fully comprehending their pain and hardships as if we were personally experiencing them. We are also encouraged to keep them in our thoughts and prayers and extend love and care to them through acts of compassion.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, Hebrews 13:2-3 and Matthew 22:34-40 remind us of the importance of love, compassion, and empathy. These verses, though situated in different contexts, share a common thread—a resounding call to put love into action. They challenge us not only to remember those who are strangers, mistreated, or imprisoned but to extend our hearts and hands to them, actively caring for their well-being. By doing so, we embody and obey Jesus Christ's teachings about loving both God and our neighbors.

As we reflect on this lesson, let us consider its practical application in our lives. We can begin by reaching out to those in need within our communities, showing hospitality to strangers, and offering support to those who suffer. Engaging in volunteer work, supporting prison ministries, or advocating for fair treatment are concrete ways to live out these teachings. By doing so, we not only deepen our own spiritual journey but can also contribute to the well-being and transformation of those we encounter.

May this lesson inspire us to live lives filled with love, compassion, and obedience, embodying God's timeless message to care for the strangers, mistreated, and prisoners who suffer.